

Chapter 9 (The bent church)

Proverbs 22:6 *“Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old, he will not depart from it.”*

Is that how we roll in Christianity? Everything is bent towards training up our children. Let's take an even shallower look. Train up the church in the way they should go and in two thousand years they will not depart from it. Did the children of the way (Christ) succeed? In so many ways Jesus kingdom movement worked perfectly. There have been billions of believers. Yet, this thing called the church has not worked out religion to the best of its ability. They have made mistakes.

In terms of grace, it has gone well. God gave us rope and room to hang ourselves. Regardless of church miscues in history, people still love Jesus. I do believe that Christianity is uncontrolled chaos. People say that God is in control. Yes, he is. Yet, he allows freedom for humanity to screw up his perfect plan. Is God's plan perfect? Yes, I do believe it is. The optics of this plan look a mess. I am not convinced that we have gone the right way. It's possible we have departed from the original training.

Did Jesus pick twelve of the best Jews in the land? Possibly, or possibly not. See Wikipedia on Judas. Would Peter or Paul consider themselves Saints? I'm sure Thomas would doubt that too. In a nut shell I believe God allows his plan to run amuck towards his perfect goal. They say that the universe is controlled chaos. That there are laws of the universe that work within black holes, super novae, and lifeless space. Yet, we have life where there should not be. There is uniformity within molecules. What looks like a big bang just might be planned. Is God's plan-controlled chaos or a big bang of recklessness?

Heaven, it's supposed to be love. John 13:35 *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* Does this world look like heaven by the love of Christian

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actions? Heaven is supposed to ooze compassion for the lost. Matthew 9:36 *“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”* Does this world think the church is all about compassion? Church has bent the rules. They have made the perfect plan look less than stellar. It was supposed to be different, new, and unique. Are this what Christianity looks like to the world today? In the view of optics God set it up perfectly. Strangely enough, betrayal and sacrifice by unsavory humans has paved the way for Christianity to work.

Jesus came down to spread the good news. The news that God loves us all despite our sin. Yet, we have tried hard to kick at the goads. To make a mess of religion. Church has, at times, not represented God well. The kingdom can be described as the now but not yet. The work of Jesus is on schedule. The Father’s plan is in motion. Still, there is a hint that the best parts of the plan are still in play. The main players (Christians) just don’t know how to play fair.

John 2:15-16 *“So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my father’s house into a market!”*

Does the church look more like heaven or hell? Think about it. Satan wanted to be God. Do we act like that? Is God, agenda driven? Seriously, think before you respond. He created this world. Set up two people to attend to it. Then these two people took matters into their own hand. Whose agenda tossed them out of Eden? Was it Gods plan all along? Satan’s plan? Adam and Eves choice?

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I contend that Hell is the one who is agenda driven. Mull this over. Satan said God had a secret agenda. Eve questioned Gods motives. Cain wanted to be number one. David desired to build a temple. Even when God said no, he still gathered the materials. Judas counted the money and counted the poor. Did Mary care how much the expensive Nard was? No, but many churches would today. Much of what is found within church is agenda driven.

Hell is also money driven. In the dictionary Mammon (money) is described as debasing. That means it depreciates over time. That is arguable. Yet, wealth is only worth what people are willing to give to have it. Adam and Eve were given Eden. I would even say they were given the keys to heaven. The perfect life. They put worth into what Satan was selling. Is that life they received worth as much as the life they had in the beginning? Is sin, abortion, famine, starvation, weeds and thistles, lies, heartbreak, and disease worth more than Eden? Many people describe our lives as hell. We chose that hell all in the name of value.

The only ministry is money ministry. Do you know that? Tell me what ministry is fueled without money. If a budget at church comes up short, what ministry falls? Why don't we embrace free ministry most of the time? Most of the ministry we devise is fueled by money. From the pulpit we preach and pray for the giving to ministry. I know that pastors almost weekly have some sort of reference to ministry within their sermon. Money is inerrantly tied to church.

I know that radio and TV pastors are different than church pastors. Yet, they all were, for the most part, church pastors at one time. Often, they tell us what they have experienced in church. They mention that church is click driven, business driven, and elder board driven. It seems as if it's normal or a rite of passage. There is an agenda flavor to church. Board meetings don't just pray. No, they discuss numbers, money, and ministry. It's all tied together.

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My view is true, and you know it. Within denominations there are click pastors. I knew a pastor that left a church directly because he had to make an appointment to see the lead pastor down the hall. Pastors' kids do get preferential treatment within ministry. Elders are rich. Their ministry ideas hold weight. What is really under the hood of a church? It was meant to represent heaven (Eden). Yet, we have made it a religion. To some it feels like hell.

This is how church has rolled for centuries. And I do mean centuries. The rule of thumb: Church always goes beyond the law.

1 Corinthians 4:6 *"Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other."*

We have taken the early church beyond the law. It's gone beyond what heaven intended. Think about it. The Hebrew nation received the Law of Moses. It all began with the Ten Commandments. Ten simple rules. If you read them, it's not that hard. Yet, people are people. If you think about it, God gave Moses extra laws (613) directly because people broke the first ten rules. They murdered, cheated, lied, and raped. Move forward thousands of years and the Jewish religious order heaped on around 514 extra laws on top of the first 623. Church loves its laws.

Jesus arrives and challenged them on a few of them. Remember Jesus telling them to honor their mother and father. Yet, one of the new laws put the church first in regards to giving before helping your parents. Money and ministry have always superseded people. Martin Luther lambasted the Pope for building St Peters cathedral over giving to the poor. He bashed the religious order for putting indulgent money ahead of salvation. It's how we role.

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Our modern church is by far no different. Don't you dare think we're better now. We were trained by our for-fathers to be like them. We are too! Take expectations for instance. We have rules for baptism. Each church has different rules. Do you really think the gospel had rules for baptism? Did Philip have conditions for baptism in regards to the Ethiopian Eunuch? We have different denominations based distinctly on our view of baptism.

We struggle with the process of salvation. What is considered holiness today? What a mess. If you deeply read the few verses at the end of Acts 2 it's simple. Yes, I will repeat it yet again. The KISS principle. Keep It Simple Stupid. However, church has refused to do that. So many denominations. So, many different views on theology. How many books have been written on improving your church? Each one focuses on numbers, money, ministry, and leadership. The road to heaven is either many paths or one narrow path. Regardless, we (the church) have been trained to make more laws and ways to get to heaven.

If you let 1 Corinthians 4:6 sink in it is humbling. We have taken church and heaven farther than it should have gone. The Alliance denomination began with a mission to bring Jesus back quicker. Evangelize the world as fast as possible to fulfill Jesus global mission. As if Gods plan could be accelerated. Even Jesus said he couldn't do that. What makes the church think it can.

The word. It's called the Bible. It's good to know your Bible well. It's bad to take single verses out of context. It's odd, but knowing too much just might be bad. I have been listening to a certain theologian that has taken this verse Psalm 82:6 "*God has taken his place in the divine council*" and made a ministry out of it. He believes there are other lower gods subject to the council of God above. Now, I am not hear to judge or be picky. Has this man taken the word farther than it should go?

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Our church leadership has rules to get in. What makes a good pastor? We believe that a man or woman must have a degree in theology. They must be working on or completed a master's degree in theology. Are they asked if they have a degree in the life of hard knocks? Actually, most churches try and avoid soiled preachers. A good pastor has schooling, years of service within a church, and holy lineage. A pastor's kid certificate is very helpful in the hiring process. Then of course you must model the writing in the books of Timothy. The rules for being the right pastor for the job are clearly nuts. Admit it, there is a certain amount of value attached to schooling and lineage. What is the value given to a soiled life?

Inside an Elders board are rules. Generally, they are business men. I suppose some might have a theology degree. They are the leadership of a church. Is it essential that they know their Bible? What is more important to an elder's board. Knowing the Bible or being known in business? I read a book that felt we should have a five-flavored board. It goes something like an evangelist, a theologian, a business leader, a layman church attendee, and an artist. I suppose it could be any type they want. The point is to have variety to share different points of view. What do you think happens when a board is all business leaders? You gain a corporate church.

Why is Christianity leaning sideways these days? Oh, patrick that is not true. The modern church might be having attendance troubles but the independent church is growing. I am looking you straight in the eyes. It's all smoke and mirrors. Every new denomination grew and expanded. They all did. Even the early church. What kills it? Not paying attention to people. When money, ministry, growth, and plans become the main board meeting agenda, you're done.

I go to a church in a theatre. It's a church plant. I guarantee they have discussions on numbers and money. I guarantee they have brain stormed on how to draw people in. It's a little church slowly becoming old church. It just takes time. There is far too much corporation in

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church. It is not a business. But, Patrick we have a growing congregation and our budget has bloomed to over a million. Does that translate in the early church as ministry growth or wealth distribution? Tell me, does it?

What has happened to our trained church leaders? They have gone from raising money for the poor churches and people to raising money to build buildings and ministries. They buy planes and busses. They will do everything but give it away. The church has become the institution for the blind. We can see the numbers and budget clearly. We can see how a word or phrase can woo a crowd. Clearly parading little black children across a stage has merit to missions. Yeah, it raises money too. I have to ask, does a pastor think about the welfare of those kids a week later? Hardly, next weeks planned outline is being worked on as we speak. We see money, success, and growth. See people? oh no, were perpetually blind to that.

I know a pastor that writes his sermons 6 months in advance. It just stuns me. He said he does that just in case something goes awry and he can't write. It's planned and calculated. Guest speakers and black kids are booked ahead of time too. I know another Pastor that writes Friday night and Saturday morning. He does have a plan but he allows God time to wreck it. I love that.

See, it's not all bad news. There are plenty of churches that try and go with God's flow. Yet, we have been hired and trained from our forefathers. How long has church been a business? In church history, a group of people (the first Pentecostals) took assets from the Alliance movement to break away and begin their own denomination. It just amazes me. You began your church by taking from another Christian organization.

In a way it's the norm. Does church growth come from new believers or migrant Christians? In my city there is a ton of church hopping. Oddly enough, we have more churches today than

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ever before, yet, no new church buildings. Why? It's the corporate equivalent of mergers and takeovers. It's intruding on another's businesses territory. All done in love? Trust me, the pastors in my city rarely meet. Why? Oh, I know you know why. Satan's simple plan: divide and conquer. Who talks to those who took your people?

Church is the ultimate business training model. How to make a great team? You need different people for different tasks. Church boards are far too likeminded. They love graphs and spread sheets. It's how they think. It's mindless work. They say to the common pew attendee, this is future planning. It's complicated church culture and finance. We can navigate through it. It's smart, the business mind will profit the church. Is it compassion for the little black kid or a hurting widow? Yes, if it's worth something to the spreadsheet. The spreadsheet is bound to attendance numbers. How to draw them in these days? Who is the most entertaining and attractive flower in the city?

It seems so cruel of me to demean what a church board does. I do know church men and women that took a spiritual hit while being on a board. Why then do new church plants and evangelical free churches tend to stray from church boards? Oh, they know why. It's the needle being used to destroy a mountain. Do you have any idea how long it would take to erode a mountain using a needle? The excuses swirling around money and time are no different. We have to plan, build, and forecast to reach the lost. Do you really have any idea how long it might take to evangelize the world? Ask the board, they will get back to you in six months.

I believe that the current corporate church atmosphere knows how long. Everything within a church is constructed to take time. Time in meetings. Evaluation of ministry. Predictions and graphs of the next five years. I sat in church for years and years seeing the attendance and giving posted in the back of the church bulletin. Like clockwork at tax time and around the fiscal end of

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the year in June they have giving sermons. The whole thing is wrapped up in a nice package to play the church game. What do you think could drain good board members? Spreadsheets over people.

Under promise and over deliver is a saying I have heard that phrase twice in the last few days. We had an election. Duh! In church circles we over promise and under deliver. God must have a different plan? Yet, you prayed right? We set this ministry in motion but people did not come. God must have a different direction. Yet, you prayed right? We let this pastor go, it wasn't the right fit. Yet, you prayed right?

In the name of God, we will project to over budget. Give God room to grow. Surely, we must believe that God wants bigger and better things for his children. Then by Christmas we are cutting back just a little. Give us your tax return. Sign over your inheritance. Then near June we have an emergency meeting to balance the books far below predictions. Then by the time fall comes around were over shooting once again. The problem we have is our intoxication with the prosperity Gospel. God does not do it that way. Oh, but we want him too though.

As I discussed in the last two chapters. The money is there for the taking. Very few people tithe. Quite honestly, you don't need bigger congregations. You need bigger hearts for Gods kingdom work. The trouble is in the truth. In a small church of 250 people, they might barley survive. Why? The majority are not giving enough and the ministries are far too ambitious. Yet, that's not how we roll. I have sat in university classrooms talking about church planting. They said around fifty people is a good base to have in the first few years. It goes up from there.

It's a sliding scale. Fifty is good in the first year. Fifty is bad in the second year. One hundred is good in the second year. A five-year plan does include bigger venues and a pastor becoming

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full time. They say that 250 is the threshold. Each pastor you hire is based on 250 per pastor. Statistically, there are thresholds to be met on a timeline. I was not given money to plant a church because I refused to name my target audience. I figured God had a plan to draw. They figured I should use a model. Draw them in and entertain them. Know your audience. Speak to their way. Don't honestly tell them Gods way. It's a fine line to keep the timeline growing.

I preached at a Chinese church for a year. On Sunday, I talked about the value of giving money away. To be free and frugal. I gave biblical examples. Afterwards one board member told me that he did not believe that was biblical to empty the storehouse. This community of believers were rich. They kept the church tight and small within a (paid for) dumpy house they renovated. Why? Frugal keeps the storehouse full. Contentious business leaders love the church storehouse.

Why do I say the church is bent? There is a fight over a building vs people. A house church is sustainable. It can be done as they did in the first century. However, to grow a church it's not that simple. That type of pastor would have to work. Yet, where do the lost look for God? I'll be honest here. It's not in a home church. I suspect very few people come to Jesus in a home church. House walls are limited. The visible church does make a difference.

I suppose home church is safer sort of. At home we can control the click. Control the Bible interpretation, and control the giving. Yet, we are commanded to seek the lost. To share the gospel with the whole world. Big church (outside the home) can do that way more efficiently. That's the problem. Were almost dammed if we do and dammed if we stay small.

Church is bent because as humans we are bread to succeed. Business sense makes sense. Business sense loves human nature too. We must overcome mountains, cross seas, and change the world. It's who God is and who we are. The trouble is were also human with a human nature.

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The essence of Christianity is knowing God and sin. The mixture between hell bent and heaven bound. Church has tried to look holy for thousands of years. To fool the masses? Yet, the masses are not stupid. A sinner takes one to know one.

Bent church plans Gods agenda for him. Oh, we say its Gods plan, but would God under give? Would God cut ministry? Would God have a storehouse or give it away? We are a bent people. Business is king. Sustaining your pastor job is king. Being on the board is king. Yet, we are fooling ourselves into believing were doing it God's way. When will we wake up and see that sinners are running a church and not holy wannabees?

We are bent in the lie. Church is not a holy place. It's a place where sinners go. The saved are not sinless. Yet, church has tried to promote that we can be. Pastors and elders are given a pass on sin directly because the Bible says to only hire upstanding men and women. They forgot that people are inherently sinners. Spiderman says *that with great power comes great responsibility*. The power of saying your God ordained is bent theology. I suspect that God only ordained Jesus. Peter was still a sinner as was Moses, David, and Paul.

To ask the leadership in the church to uphold Gods holy institution was a stupid move. Lost people always respond that "when" they clean up their act they will come to church. Equally they point out fallen saints who ain't what they claimed to be. Raising home schooled PK kids is a bad idea. Hiring them to move the church into a new era is just as stupid. You can't talk about what you do not know. So, we train a child to keep church holy. We train kids to hide our human nature behind the walls. Bent theology!

The major difference between 1st century church and the institution today is simple. We think it's a business model. We think it's bigger and more organized. The biggest difference is people.

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Everything the 1st century church did was to take care of their own. To make life better for those who couldn't. They didn't preach the word, but rather they showed the word to the world. This is the real church. Acts 2:46-47 *“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

Read the ninety-five theses of Martin Luther. He got it! Read Paul's ministry, he got it! That little exchange between Jesus and Judas over money and the poor. Jesus knew what everyone else missed: people. In the hospitals, why are so many nurses Christian? The early church was famous for helping the sick. It's always been that way. Yet, we are far from the sick and needy today. They must come to the ministries we make. Do we really go to them?

Church is bent because it's overthinking the simple plan. Care for Gods own. We think that means Christians, yet John 3:16 screams no! We're overthinking doctrine, the verses, and their meaning. Some believe that the writings were meant to be unraveled. To be understood. The disciples spent three whole years with Jesus. Yet, it says that they did not get it until Jesus came back from the dead. The kingdom is now but not yet. Not everything God is doing in his word has been revealed now. What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 *“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”* Does the corporate church dig that groove?

For a split second the Jewish church was divided over Jews and gentiles. God chose twelve Jewish men. Jesus came to begin with the Jews. To save Jews? No, to save the world through Jews. They knew God. It makes sense. Then God had them see the old scriptures clearer. He opened up those words to better understanding. The gentiles were included. God grew up

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leaders like Paul and Peter to change church forever. Think about it. One was learned and one was not. Yet, they both served the gentiles: lost people.

Have you ever thought that God involved the whole world in the beginning? The whole world had a chance to embrace Gods kingdom within the first twelve chapters of Genesis. Time after time they rejected his love before the flood and before Babel. Then God narrowed it down to one tribe of Abraham. They too rejected God and were scattered throughout the known world.

What is Jerusalem? It's a focal point where God meets world. The Roman culture had integrated everything they touched. Drew all tribes and tongues to the Roman world. Then Jesus came and took Jerusalem to task. He offered them a way through. A way that they thoroughly rejected. How has Christianity grown? It's by diaspora Jews that were cast out of Jerusalem after the sacking of that city in 70AD. God has always humbled his church. Why? It's because they always eventually reject him. Yet, the gospel remains.

Why has modern church suffered? Why have I called this latest rendition of God's kingdom bent? It's probably time to cast church to the wind. To reset it yet again. Church has become too much like the world. It's a crafted entertainment show. Does it need to be this way to reach this generation? No, but church leaders think it does. The simple way. It all comes through the word "share." The sharing of bread and wealth is all you need. A sharing of God's word. Big church and big ministry could work, but... We are bent on gathering and storing what God provides. Programs and overseas missions are not church. It never was. Sharing is.

In Nehemiah he is building a wall. At one point there was a statement that they held a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other. That is church in a nut shell. We must do kingdom work. God wants us to participate. On the other side we must defend the kingdom. That means

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we need good theology. We need good translations. We do. Yet, everything else is just ashes to ashes and dust to dust. We are spending far too much time making church a complicated mess.

We think that church is advancing through programs and ministry. Yet the end of Acts 2 is humbling. How does a virus spread? It's one touch at a time. One conversation. One encounter. Do we need to spend over one thousand dollars on hotels and flights to change a community in Africa? There are African people right here living next door to your church in low-cost housing. I have seen African men on the streets homeless. God has provided cheap and free opportunities to spread the word. How to unbend the church? Become a God virus. What if we infected Africans here in North America and sent them home? What if we infected the lost and sent them out into the world they came from? What if we could unbend the church?